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ELKRIDGE PATCH

Federal Process for Evaluating Impact of Train-Truck Facility Unclear to Citizens, Politicians, Environmental Officials

The National Environmental Policy Act evaluation process hasn't officially begun; residents are concerned about the environmental impact.

By [Elizabeth Janney](#) | [Email the author](#) | May 24, 2011

Residential stakeholders in the construction of an industrial truck-train transfer facility in central Maryland say they have received confusing information about the process of determining the site's environmental impact.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) has been a buzzword for officials looking to sidestep citizens' concerns about the intermodal facility CSX wants to build in central Maryland, greater Elkridge residents say.

Outside the Elkridge library last week, Rep. John Sarbanes, D-MD, heard from a group of citizens holding signs that said "Stop Intermodal Now." They told him they opposed the facility being built in a residential area, where they worried health problems could result from diesel fumes generated by the hundreds of trucks transportation officials said will be coming and going.

Sarbanes said he didn't want to "prejudge the NEPA process," which he stated would address the residents' issues.

"They use it as a cover," said Pam Bertrand, who lives near the Hanover site, referring to officials' reference to NEPA. She and other residents have said they believe that state and railroad officials have already determined where the intermodal facility will go, citing that CSX purchased land in Hanover and not three other potential sites. The other sites are on Montevideo Road (Howard County), off Brock Bridge Road (Anne Arundel County) and in Beltsville (Prince George's County).

"They have been less than transparent," agreed Mitch Buchman, who lives in Patapsco Ridge. Sarbanes conceded, "There are some cracks in the process."

The NEPA process is a 12-month undertaking that involves research of potential impacts from development.

Bertrand said that officials have been unclear about when the NEPA process actually begins.

In March, representatives from the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) told Elkridge residents that the NEPA process had started, indicating in a slide presentation that the project was in the “planning and scoping phase.”

During a series of public workshops in April, officials said that the NEPA process had not begun.

Last week, CSX and MDOT officials told residents of Beltsville—one of the locations proposed for the project—that the NEPA process has not begun but that they are collecting research on traffic and other potential effects of the project. They did not specify how long that would take.

Politicians, Residents Worry about Environmental Impact

Beltsville residents said they were also concerned about the process. They were especially concerned about any potential environmental impact.

“It’s [a] mitigation area from the ICC,” Del. Barbara Frush, D-Anne Arundel and Prince George’s Counties, said at the Beltsville Citizens Association meeting. Frush is on the state’s Environmental Matters Committee.

“I see this as an environmental nightmare for our constituents, our community and just plain the environment,” she told CSX and MDOT officials at the meeting. “We don’t believe that it belongs in this community.”

Howard County Councilwoman Courtney Watson proposed legislation that would require the county’s Environmental Sustainability Board to review any environmental impact of an intermodal facility at the Hanover/Race Road and Montevideo Road sites.

Joshua Feldmark, director of the Office of Environmental Sustainability, stated he had “logistical concerns” at the May 16 council meeting.

“In light of the fact that the NEPA process is currently underway, the role proposed for the board in relation to the process is unclear,” said Feldmark.

He proposed that the board serve in an advisory role for the county after the NEPA process concludes.

Beltsville residents too wanted to ensure that their neighborhood was thoroughly evaluated for environmental impacts and asked whether organizations like the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service had been brought into the conversation.

Dominic Wiker of MDOT said that CSX and MDOT have asked for comments from federal environmental agencies, and feedback has "started to come in."

Currently, comments from environmental agencies are not posted on the project website.

Sharon Daboin, resident vice president of CSX, told Beltsville residents that there would be another series of workshops by the end of the summer. Daboin said that those workshops were not NEPA-related but "just public information workshops."

According to the intermodal project website, the NEPA process begins in summer 2011.